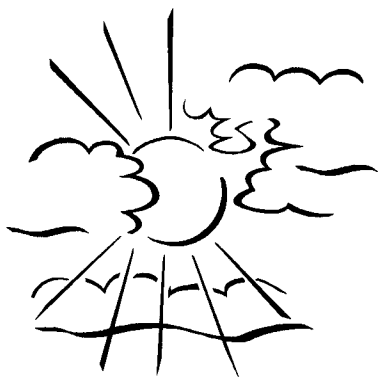


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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, August 10, 2005

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Workers swelling rolls of Medicaid

Many choose it over private health plans

By Dennis Cauchon
USA TODAY

The nation has so vastly extended taxpayer-funded Medicaid to the working poor this decade that it has produced the biggest expansion of a government entitlement since the Great Society was launched in the 1960s, a USA TODAY analysis has found.

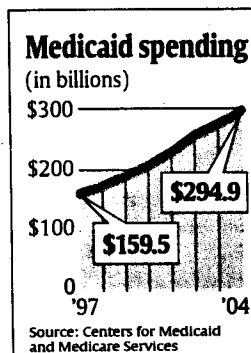
With little notice, the medical care program paid by federal and state taxpayers has grown from covering 34 million people in 1999 to 47 million in 2004, an examination of government data shows.

The expansion has cemented government's role as the nation's primary health insurer. About 100 million people — 1 in 3 — now have government coverage through Medicaid, Medicare, the military and federal employee health plans. More than 10 million others are eligible for Medicaid but have not signed up.

The expansion has won bipartisan support in Washington and state capitals, as a consensus has emerged to provide medical care for the poor, especially children. President Bush has proposed spending \$1 billion over two years to encourage eligible families to sign up for Medicaid.

Medicaid's growth has continued despite debates about spiraling costs and controversial efforts in Tennessee and Missouri to scale it back. The growth is an aftershock of welfare reform, which since 1997 has pushed individuals off welfare and into the workforce. To support low-wage workers, Congress and state legislatures expanded coverage to low-income working families. Medicaid previously had gone primarily to welfare recipients.

Today, a family of four can earn as much as \$40,000 a year in most states and get government health insurance for children. The nation's median household income was \$43,318 in 2003, the Census Bureau says.



By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

Family impact

■ Living with 'The Card,' 5A

8/2/05



The expansion has had far-reaching consequences:

► **More children insured.** The portion of children without insurance fell from 14.8% in 1997 to 11.7% in 2004, the Health and Human Services Department reports. The rate of young children being vaccinated has increased from 72% in 2000 to a record 81% in 2004.

► **Higher costs.** Medicaid spending grew from \$159 billion in 1997 to \$295 billion in 2004. That 85% increase is nearly twice the rise in Medicare, which insures seniors. Washington pays 59% of Medicaid's cost; states pay the rest.

► **Reduced private insurance.** Many low-income workers are choosing Medicaid over employer insurance because it is less expensive and often covers more. Medicaid is free or nearly free for recipients. Out-of-pocket costs and the range of services covered vary by state. The percentage of children covered by private insurance fell from 65% in 1999 to 59% in 2004, while those on Medicaid rose from 22% to 29%.

Critics of Medicaid's expansion say it is adding to the federal budget deficit — \$412 billion in 2004 — and luring people from employer-offered insurance.

"Shame on us for creating perverse incentives that cause people to give up private coverage for Medicaid," says Michael Cannon, director of health care studies at the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington.

But supporters say most Medicaid recipients have no other option and need coverage to keep working. John Begala, a member of the Ohio Commission to Reform Medicaid, says Medicaid's expansion "is one of the great policy success stories of the decade."

Welfare reform opens Medicaid

Record expansion for working poor was part of plan. As one expert observes: 'This is not a mistake.'

By Dennis Cauchon -
USA TODAY

MARIETTA, Ohio — Jeremy Carpenter, 20, is a mechanic at a used car lot. His wife, Jessica, 21, stays home with their infant son and often cares for two nephews.

Before welfare reform, this working family would have been mostly or entirely without health insurance. Today, the Carpenters have complete government-financed medical, dental and optical care. So does Jessica's sister, a Wendy's restaurant manager, and her husband, a carpenter.

"I don't know what we'd do without 'The Card,'" says Jessica Carpenter, referring to a prized piece of paper twice the size of a driver's license that entitles her family to nearly free medical care.

The expansion of Medicaid to cover the working poor has fundamentally broadened the nation's safety net and changed the lives of low-wage workers in the USA. It also has put enormous strain on federal and state finances and made taxpayers the health insurance provider for millions of workers at Wal-Mart, McDonald's and other low-wage employers.

The success of welfare reform in moving people off of cash assistance and into low-paying jobs has, for better or worse, moved the nation a step closer to a government-run national health care system. The change has occurred mostly in poor and working-class neighborhoods, out of view of the affluent and well-insured.

But here in Washington County, a relatively poor area along the Ohio River and the Appalachian Mountains, the change is startling.

Dramatic numbers

The county had 427 families on cash assistance in 1997 when welfare reform began. Today, it has just three. During that time, the number of people on Medicaid rose from 4,020 in 1997 to 7,316 today.

"People who left welfare went into jobs paying \$5.15 to \$7.15 an hour," says Michael Paxton, the county's welfare director. "Medicaid and food stamps and child care assistance make it possible for people to work at low wages."

Health coverage has been a costly side effect of welfare reform. Medicaid spending has soared 85% since 1997, to \$295 billion last year. The program's growth has outstripped that of Medicare, the government insurance program for seniors. Medicaid enrollment surpassed Medicare's in 2001 and now covers 5 million more Americans.

Many states now spend more on Medicaid than anything else, including education. Tennessee and Missouri recently scaled back Medicaid coverage. But, overall, state legislatures largely have protected and expanded Medicaid spending, even during the recession earlier this decade. One reason: Every \$1 in state spending on Medicaid generates an average of

\$1.44 in federal matching money.

Medicaid and the related Children's Health Insurance Program covered an average of 46.8 million Americans a day in 2004, up more than 13 million from when welfare reform passed in 1997. The program covered 61 million people at some time during 2004, nearly 20 million more than in 1997.

Without saying so directly, the Republican-controlled Congress has retooled Medicaid from a program that helps mostly the poor and disabled into one that tackles the issue of working Americans who don't have health insurance.

"This is not a mistake. It was the explicit intent of Congress to expand coverage to working families," says Ron Haskins, co-author of the book *Welfare Reform and Beyond*. "The original sin of social policy was tying Medicaid directly to welfare. Now, it's tied to working."

States determine who qualifies for Medicaid, so eligibility varies.

In Minnesota, for instance, a family of four with annual income up to \$54,000 qualifies for Medicaid. A single adult without kids can earn up to \$17,000 (about \$8.25 an hour full time) and get Medicaid. This brings nearly universal coverage to fast-food workers, nursing aides and other low-income workers.

Visible effects

Ohio has stricter rules than most states. Adults without children don't get insurance unless they have exceptionally high medical bills. Even so, Medicaid enrollment

USA TODAY · TUESDAY, AUGUST 2, 2005 · 5A

to millions

has grown from 1.1 million in 1997 to 1.7 million today, or about 15% of the state's population.

For those who qualify — generally children in families earning up to \$40,000 and parents in families earning up to \$20,000 — Ohio's package covers a wider range of services than in most states.

The Medicaid boom can be seen in medical clinics opening in poor neighborhoods. A dental clinic aimed at Medicaid patients opened here in Marietta, a block from the welfare office.

In Springfield, the Rocking Horse Center, a modern pediatric clinic, opened in 1999 in the poorest neighborhood of the central Ohio city and now serves 6,000 children. It doubled in size this year with a federal grant secured by Sen. Mike DeWine and Rep. Dave Hobson, both Ohio Republicans.

The non-profit center has three workers who use computers connected to the state Medicaid system to qualify people for coverage. "There's no doubt children are receiving better medical care because of this money," says pediatrician James Duffee, the clinic's founder.

Without the Medicaid expansion, 12% to 14% of patients' medical bills would be unpaid, instead of the current 3% to 4%, Duffee says.

Republicans and Democrats have supported efforts to expand health insurance for poor children and parents, Duffee says. "Our motto is: Not from the left, not from the right, but from the spirit."

Medicaid costs also have risen because of aggressive efforts to get eligible people to sign up. States have simplified paperwork, made renewals automatic or less frequent and even sent workers door-to-door to sign up eligible families.

The welfare office in Athens County, west of Marietta in eastern Ohio, used billboards to advertise

Medicaid, which is called Healthy Start and Healthy Families in Ohio.

"We wouldn't dare have billboards saying, 'Come down and sign up for welfare,' even though Medicaid is a form of welfare," says Jack Frech, county welfare director. "This program doesn't have the stigma of welfare or food stamps."

Medicaid advocates hope that added coverage will prevent higher costs in the future through reduced emergency room visits and other social problems. New Hampshire added mental health coverage this year. Colorado added weight-loss programs — \$399 for a 12-week plan — and alcohol and drug rehab to its benefit package July 1.

"It is cost-effective to have Medicaid cover more things because our hospitals are groaning under the weight of so much uncompensated care," Colorado House Speaker Andrew Romanoff says.

Beats company coverage

Many workers choose Medicaid over insurance offered by their employers because it is less expensive. Wal-Mart workers pay \$273 a month for the company's family medical coverage and get fewer benefits than Medicaid.

(Medicaid is free or nearly free for recipients. Specific out-of-pocket costs and the range of services covered vary by state.)

Wal-Mart does not encourage its employees to use Medicaid, spokesman Dan Fogleman says. "But our employees are cost-conscious, and they do what's best for their families," he says.

Delaya Short, 30, of Chesapeake, in southeastern Ohio, had dental problems so severe that she could hardly chew before she went on Medicaid. Her husband is a welder on a barge, and their family of five could not afford his company's medical insurance.

"My life changed when I was told I could get The Card," she says. She had a root canal and fillings. Her children got their teeth cleaned and caps on their teeth. Her 7-year-old daughter got an ear infection a few months ago. "With The Card, I didn't have to worry about what it would cost to take her to the doctor."

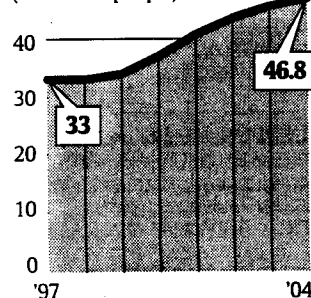
Heather Root, 28, a mother of three from Marietta, worries about losing The Card, which, in the past few months, has paid for her children to be treated for meningitis, ear infections, bipolar disorder and other problems.

She doesn't know how much that medical care cost. She never saw the bill.

Her husband recently went from a \$7-an-hour job as a roofer to a \$13-an-hour maintenance job in a factory. "I dread getting a letter saying I'm off The Card," she says.

Average enrollment

(millions of people)



Source: Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

Medicare lowers drug premiums

Insurers' bids may encourage sign-ups

August 10, 2005

BY KRISTEN HALLAM
BLOOMBERG

Premiums for the new Medicare drug benefit will cost 14% less than the government previously estimated, which could encourage more seniors to sign up for the coverage, program chief Mark McClellan said Tuesday.

Participants in the health program for elderly and disabled people will pay an average of \$32.20 a month, down from the \$37.37 that the government estimated in March, McClellan told reporters at a briefing in Washington, D.C.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services based the new estimates on bids from insurance companies such as Aetna Inc. and UnitedHealth Group Inc. to operate the program when it starts Jan. 1. The government and the insurers are trying to encourage participation in the voluntary plan.

"Smaller rather than larger premiums make it more likely that seniors will show up," said Alec Vachon, president of the Washington-based consulting firm Hamilton PPB.

As many as 30 million of Medicare's 42 million beneficiaries will sign up for the drug coverage next year, according to government estimates. The lower estimated premiums are the result of effective negotiations by insurance companies with drug manufacturers and efforts to promote the use of cheaper generic medicines, McClellan said. It's also possible that some plans might charge no premium to Medicare patients, McClellan said.

"This is a validation of our tools to control costs," said Karen Ignagni, president of the trade group America's Health Insurance Plans, in an interview Tuesday. "It's a strong encouragement to seniors to sign up for this program."

Medicare's share of the monthly costs will be about \$94.08 for each enrollee, 14% less than a March estimate of \$109.18, McClellan said. That could save taxpayers billions of dollars, said Sen. Charles Grassley, an Iowa Republican who helped write the Medicare drug law in 2003.

"When Congress crafted the Medicare prescription drug benefit, I worked hard with my colleagues to make sure that it would be as affordable as possible for beneficiaries and taxpayers," Grassley said.

Drug premiums will be lower for seniors enrolled in managed-care plans under the Medicare Advantage program than premiums paid by patients in plans that offer only drug insurance, McClellan said. That might encourage more seniors to enroll in comprehensive health plans that receive government subsidies, he said. About 5 million seniors are in such plans.

State Police continue to investigate teacher

Bay City Times

Wednesday, August 10, 2005

CASS CITY - Michigan State Police continue investigating a Cass City music teacher accused of sexually inappropriate conduct with a female student.

Leaders of the Cass City Public School District suspended Douglas P. Burtch with pay on July 18 after the former student - now a Cass City High School graduate - made her allegations.

Burtch, 28, will remain suspended pending completion of the investigation by a detective at the state police post at Sandusky, said Kenneth Micklash, superintendent of the Cass City district based in Tuscola County.

The inappropriate conduct allegedly took place off school premises both this past school year and during the 2003-2004 school year, when Burtch began working as district music director.

Micklash said the question of whether Burtch engaged in such conduct with other students "may be part of the (police) investigation."

The Times could not reach Burtch for comment.

The Cass City district has hired Wayne Smith of Caro, a retired band instructor with the Kingston Community School District, to teach music in Burtch's absence.

Smith will begin working next week and be paid an amount of money for each day employed in that role. Burtch remains the district's director of music until school leaders determine whether to continue employing him following the police probe.

Lawsuit alleges boy was abused at Hastings camp

Trace Christenson

The Battle Creek Enquirer

August 10, 2005

HASTINGS — A lawyer for a camp being sued by an Illinois family said he reviewed the allegations of abuse two years ago.

"We take these allegations seriously, and they will be dealt with through the appropriate channels," said Thomas Baker, an attorney from Kalamazoo. "We had an investigation that took place and that is as far as it went."

Baker declined Tuesday to comment further on the allegations by former camper Ezekiel Losoya and his parents, Ronald and Jill Losoya of Cary, Ill.

The family is suing Camp Michawana Inc., at Long Lake in Barry County, alleging that the boy, who was 11 at the time, was abused by counselors and other campers while there for a week in August 2003.

The lawsuit, filed Monday in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan, alleged the boy was subjected to "hurtful, negative, outrageous, inhumane, degrading and criminal conduct by Camp Michawana and its counselors, either directly or through permitting these activities by other campers."

The suit alleges that the boy was threatened that someone would come kill him, his nipples were pinched and twisted, he was dunked in a toilet, kicked in his genitals, teased, urinated on and had items from his family taken.

The boy's parents did not return phone calls from the Enquirer on Tuesday.

The suit is being assigned to Judge Richard Enslen in Kalamazoo.

Baker said he has not yet seen a copy of the court papers and would not comment on the suit.

"I have to see what they (are) alleging," Baker said.

Roger Bird, executive director of the camp, also has not seen the lawsuit and would not comment.

"The only reason I know there is a lawsuit against Camp Michawana is because the news is reporting it," Bird said Tuesday.

He has been director of the camp, founded in 1938, since January 2004, and had not been aware of the allegations before learning of the lawsuit.

Bird said the Michawana Youth Camp and Retreat Center holds seven weeks of summer camp for about 800 children in fourth grade through senior high.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Family claims son tortured at camp

Wednesday, August 10, 2005

By John Agar

The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- He said he was tied to the tether-ball pole, suffered swirlies and wedgies and was warned not to call home.

Sound like typical summer camp?

Not to the family of 13-year-old Ezekiel Losoya.

His parents, Ronald and Jill Losoya of Cary, Ill., filed a federal lawsuit, alleging "inhumane, degrading and criminal conduct," against Camp Michawana, a Christian-based summer camp along Long Lake in Hastings.

The abuse was relentless during his weeklong stay in 2003, his attorney said.

"Contrary to the Camp Michawana representations that campers who come to Camp Michawana would be treated with care and have a positive, Christian-based experience, Ezekiel was subjected to ... hurtful, negative, outrageous, inhumane, degrading and criminal conduct by Camp Michawana and its counselors, either directly or through permitting these activities by other campers," attorney James Jamo wrote in the lawsuit.

Roger Bird, who became executive director of the camp after the incidents allegedly occurred, said he could not imagine that staff allowed it. He had not seen the lawsuit.

If such incidents occurred, staff would "deal with it quickly, and put a stop to it. To see and hear that kind of allegation really seems really outrageous."

Bird said he was disappointed the reputation of a camp that has touched thousands of lives over the past 67 years could be tarnished by a single complaint. About 800 children passed through the camp this summer. It operates year-round, with programs for adults as well.

He also questioned why a public-relations company sent word of the lawsuit to area news organizations before serving Camp Michawana officials.

CONTINUED

Family claims son tortured at camp

Page 2 of 2

It sounded like the plaintiffs were "really trying to be vicious," he said.

He insisted staff would not condone such bullying.

But the boy's mother, who attended the camp as a child, couldn't imagine it either, the family's attorney said.

Beyond being tied to the tether-ball pole, being whipped with a towel, having his head dunked in the toilet, and his underwear pulled tight in a "wedgie," the attorney said the boy suffered indignities meant to humiliate, if not injure, him:

His nipples were pinched and twisted, he was kicked "in the privates," and told to "stop crying like a baby."

He was shown a trap door and told he could be put there.

He lost his candy and cookies to bullies.

During naps for his low-blood sugar, others screamed in his ear.

Campers urinated on his leg and stuffed animal, and spit on him while he was dragged by his arms and legs.

Food bank, Gleaners merge

By John Michalak

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: August 7, 2005

The message of holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Eight Mile and Dequindre celebrating the merger of the Food Bank of Oakland County with Gleaners Community Food Bank of Wayne County couldn't be missed

It showed that two areas divided geographically by Eight Mile and known for decades of political feuding really can break down the barriers for a common purpose like feeding the hungry.

The two groups which provide huge amounts of food for the needy at churches, soup kitchens, shelters and group homes are now one and called Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan.

"The one thing it does is give us a great ability to improve," said Gleaners President and CEO Agostinho "Augie" Fernandes. "It no longer is a geographic boundary. We are bringing together two strong teams. We will refocus to better serve the pantries and soup kitchens. We will be better able to touch families."

Fernandes said the budget for Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan will be \$8 million. The merged organizations will serve 440 agencies in southeast Michigan, he added.

The merger brings two dynamic teams together to care for children, senior citizens and the working poor, Fernandes said.

John Dziurgot, former director of operations for the Food Bank of Oakland County, and now director of operations for all five of the Gleaners facilities, said the merger will help Oakland County.

The Food Bank had one collection location and now as part of Gleaners it has five, he said.

Both groups will see a savings by sharing trucks and personnel. It also will have improved technology and added facilities in Warren, Taylor, Livingston, Pontiac and Detroit, he said.

"We'll provide more food for people in Oakland County," Dziurgot said.

"With greater financial strength, we can better serve our agencies."

The ceremony at the Belmont Shopping Center on the southeast corner of Eight Mile and Dequindre in Detroit brought together a contingent of elected officials from Oakland and Wayne Counties.

Oakland County Deputy Executive Phil Bertolini applauded the merger.

"A number of our citizens have terrible decisions to make," Bertolini said. "They have to decide whether to eat, buy medications or pay the rent. We are blessed to have this partnership."

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano said Gleaners reaches those "who are in the shadows of life." By regionalizing, Gleaners will "provide a seamless food delivery system," he added.

State Rep. Morris Hood III said the consolidation of the two groups will help the new Gleaners facilitate and manage better.

"Eight Mile has been known as a dividing factor and we want to break that down," Hood added.

A truck from each of the old organizations crossed Eight Mile breaking a ribbon while police held back traffic.

State Rep Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, said the celebration had special meaning to him. He recalled going to Gleaners as a young boy and volunteering his services.

He also recalled a childhood when donated food and hand-me-down clothing helped his family at a time when his father was disabled.

"I understand this plight in a very personal way," said Meisner, adding the merger will have a positive impact. "Regional cooperation is really important and I hope we can build on it."

Contact John Michalak at john.michalak@dailytribune.com or 248-591-2521.

The Ann Arbor News

August 10, 2005

Letters to the editor

Local lawmakers need to back hunger-free act

With Michigan's unemployment rate being one of the highest in the country, local food providers are seeing unprecedented increases in demand for their assistance.

In Michigan it is estimated that over 10 percent of our population is in households struggling to put food on the table. Nationally, over 32 million people (including 13 million children) are facing hunger.

CONTINUED

LETTERS

Page 2 of 2

It does not have to be this way. With the goal of cutting domestic hunger in half by 2010, the Hunger Free Communities Act has been introduced in Congress. This legislation would seek to strengthen and expand proven federal nutrition programs, and provide support to state and community food programs, such as Food Gatherers, in our local area. Also, the act would require annual reports on progress toward the 2010 goal and better data collection to inform policymakers about who is hungry and why.

The Hunger Free Communities Act has also been introduced at a critical time as there have been calls for funding cuts to nutrition programs.

In April, Congress passed a budget resolution calling for reduced funding for agriculture programs, which would involve cuts to hunger programs. In addition, the Bush administration has called for cuts to the Food Stamp program over the next five years.

Ending hunger in our country is definitely a nonpartisan concern. Along these lines it is interesting to note that the first four members of the Michigan Congressional delegation to co-sponsor the Hunger Free Communities Act are two of the more conservative Republicans, Reps. Ehlers and McCotter. They were joined by two of the more liberal Michigan Democrats, Reps. Kildee and Stupak.

Hunger is growing in our state and country and I urge both Reps. Dingell and Schwarz to co-sponsor the Hunger Free Communities Act and help our fellow state citizens in a great time of need.

Robert A. Krzewinski, Ypsilanti

Michigan Report

August 9, 2005

STUDY: ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS POORER

Families have to be poorer now than 10 years ago to qualify for state cash assistance and they remain poorer while on that assistance, according to a report released Tuesday by the Michigan League for Human Services.

Because the assistance grant and the eligibility levels have not been adjusted since 1993, inflation has left those needing the assistance at 36 percent of poverty and has stripped about a third of the value from their grant, the report said.

The League used the report to renew its push for increases in both the maximum grant and the maximum allowed income to qualify for assistance.

“It is shocking that policymakers believe that families can survive at an income level so far below the poverty level,” said Ann Marston, League president.

The group also noted that Michigan’s maximum eligible income, \$774 for a family of three in Wayne County including the Family Independence Program grant, is less than most surrounding states and about half the \$1,497 a month allowed in Minnesota.

Battle Creek Enquirer

August 10, 2005

Letters to the editor

Slaying victim was not homeless

The family of Anthony Headen would like to express concerns about the write-up in the newspaper. Anthony Headen was not homeless. He had many family members who loved him and he was staying with his ex-wife and kids.

Yes, he did frequent that bridge and knew people under that bridge, but that is and was not his home. You made him sound like a vagabond. You never mentioned he served time in the Army, loved to go to church and was a faithful father and friend. You never bothered to talk to any family members to find out if what you printed was true. Statements were taken and assumed true, which we feel were inadequate information. We the family feel this was very unprofessional.

Family of Anthony Headen

Job Corps sets open house to mark 40th anniversary

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, August 10, 2005

By Ron Fonger rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

FLINT

The Flint/Genesee Job Corps Center, 2400 N. Saginaw St., will mark the 40th anniversary of the national Job Corps program on Aug. 25.

The center will offer tours of the facility, provide an overview of the program and serve refreshments during open houses scheduled for 1-4 p.m. and 6-8 p.m.

Job Corps provides education, employability skills and independent living skills to at-risk adults to prepare them for higher-paying careers, according to a news release.

- Ron Fonger

Detroit News
August 10, 2005

Wayne People in the News

Dearborn

Governor Granholm has appointed **Ismael Ahmed**, executive director of the Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services, to the Executive Committee and Corporation Board of the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation for a term expiring July 22, 2009.

The Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation is nonprofit public corporation to coordinate state and local efforts to promote early childhood development activities in Michigan.

Detroit News
Wayne Briefs
August 10, 2005

Inkster

Grant to support life skills program

Starfish Family Services recently received \$1.1 million in new funding through a grant from the McGregor Fund and money from other community sources, including corporations. The money will be used for a life skills program for families and their children. Starfish is a private, nonprofit human service agency with a 42-year history of helping families throughout southeast Michigan. Last year, the agency served 7,000 at-risk children and families through 18 programs. The McGregor Fund is a private foundation that has supported Starfish programs since 1987.